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ABSTRACT

This paper is a summary of a "how to" workshop, focusing on design guidelines when moving from an onsite course to an online course. Three most basic considerations are content knowledge, pedagogical skill, and higher-order thinking dispositions. Transferring content to an online environment requires technological expertise, and facilitating growth in a student's knowledge base through interaction of literacies requires mindfulness. The workshop is intended for teachers of adult learners who are truly concerned with building thinking persons. The following principles of best practice learning are summarized: student-centered; experiential; holistic; authentic; expressive; reflective; social; collaborative; democratic; cognitive; developmental; constructivist; and challenging. A model to guide teachers in designing online courses to increase learning through improved teaching is presented. (MES)

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Designing a "Best Practice" Online Course

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Abstract: This paper is a summary of a "how to" workshop, focusing on design guidelines when moving from an onsite course to an online course. Three most basic considerations are content knowledge, pedagogical skill, and higher-order thinking dispositions. Transferring content to an online environment requires technological expertise. Insuring learning in an online environment requires pedagogical expertise, and facilitating growth in a student's knowledge base through interaction of literacies requires mindfulness. This workshop is intended for teachers of adult learners who are truly concerned with building thinking persons. We will present a model to guide teachers in designing online courses to increase learning through improved teaching.

Introduction

Teachers who are critically literate have explored their own "ways of knowing" through the interaction of all their literacies. Believing that technology is a literacy, as necessary to a teaching and learning life as reading, writing, listening, speaking, thinking and viewing, led to the design of an online model incorporating "best practice" and "higher-order thinking." Adding technology to the curriculum or teaching it as a skill, is a very different process than integrating technology for lesson enhancement. Beginning with what we know about "Best Practice" and what the audience knows about "Best Practice," we would like to create some new designs for online courses developed from a model with the intentional integration of *all* our literacies. Teachers who have had the opportunity to explore and understand the power of writing their own literacy histories, will be better models of critical literacy for adult students.

The model introduced in this workshop depends on strong dispositions toward teaching (modeling) critical and reflective thinking strategies. Guidelines for incorporating critical and reflective thinking strategies are adaptations from Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives (1956). A content rich syllabus is the driving force for a good onsite or online course, but what makes a course exceptional is the concept of "integrating literacies." This idea comes from whole language and constructivist philosophy where students make their own meaning and deepen their understandings through reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and thinking. Strengthening reading will strengthen writing, strengthening writing will strengthen thinking. Interaction online requires emphasis on communication skills and critical thinking.

From a movement by national curriculum specialty organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the International Reading Association, and many others who recognize the importance of emphasizing standards, the concept of "best practice" was defined. Certain educational activities stood out as most effective methods for teaching, learning, and assessing. In Methods that Matter: Six Structures for Best Practice Classrooms (1998), Daniels and Bizar write, "…there are six basic structures that help to create Best Practice classrooms" (p.5). These six structures are integrative units, small group activities, representing-to-learn, classroom workshop, authentic experiences, and reflective assessment. Daniels and Bizar go on to explain that we "need all six ingredients in order to describe the Best Practice paradigm" (p. 7). In a recent publication, Best Practice:

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New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, the authors list 13 Principles of Best Practice Learning (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 1998, p.8).

Principles of Best Practice Learning

Student-Centered. The best starting point for schooling is young people's interests; all across the curriculum investigating students' own questions should always take precedence over studying arbitrarily and distantly selected "content."

Experiential. Active, hands-on, concrete experience is the most powerful and natural form of learning. Students should be immersed in the most direct possible experience of the content of every subject.

Holistic. Children learn best when they encounter whole ideas, events, and materials in purposeful contexts, not by studying subparts isolated from actual use.

Authentic. Real, rich, complex ideas and materials are at the heart of the curriculum. Lessons or textbooks that water-down, control, or oversimplify content ultimately disempower students.

Expressive. To fully engage ideas, construct meaning, and remember information, students must regularly employ the whole range of communicative media-speech, writing, drawing, poetry, dance, drama, music, movement, and visual arts.

Reflective. Balancing the immersion in experience and expression must be opportunities for learners to reflect, debrief, abstract from their experiences what they have felt and thought and learned.

Social. Learning is always socially constructed and often interactional; teachers need to create classroom interactions that "scaffold" learning.

Collaborative. Cooperative learning activities tap the social power of learning better than competitive and individualistic approaches.

Democratic. The classroom is a model community; students learn what they live as citizens of the school.

Cognitive. The most powerful learning comes when children develop true understandings of concepts through higher-order thinking associated with various fields of inquiry and through self-monitoring of their thinking.

Developmental. Children grow through a series of definable but not rigid stages, and schooling should fit its activities to the developmental level of students.

Constructivist. Children do not just receive content; in a very real sense, they re-create and reinvent every cognitive system they encounter, including language, literacy, and mathematics.

Challenging. Students learn best when faced with genuine challenges, choices, and responsibility in their own learning.

Our concern with the "pedagogical potential" of an online course comes from the ease of moving information to a technological landscape and calling it "distance learning." White and Weight claim that "...effective online instruction requires an interpersonal approach" (2000, p.vii). In their new book, The Online Teaching Guide, these authors and other contributors, write about the human side of teaching and

learning online. Content seems to be a given, but concern for active learning, student engagement, ongoing assessment, reflective and critical thinking, student-centeredness, and an outcomes-based approach are central issues. The book incorporates the Principles of Best Practice without specifically referencing them. Those who think of distance learning as a way to increase student-teacher ratios from 1:12 to 1:800, should consider that teaching and learning online demands one-to-one student-teacher instruction, prompt feedback, significant collaborative interaction, authentic assignments, and a comfortable learning community. Extra time for preparing and delivering assignments for teachers and students is dramatically increased online, and increasing the number of students per instructor drastically reduces the quality on online teaching and learning.

Background

The main differences in moving from an online classroom to and onsite classroom are the use of technology and the non-traditional way the students and teachers communicate, interaction without the use of verbal and nonverbal responses, and the mechanics of receiving and sending assignments and feedback. All communication is electronic, including lectures, chats, tasks, assignments, projects, videos, and the portfolio. Gestures and body language in the classroom translates to reading between the lines online. In addition to technological troubleshooting when transferring messages and assignments, the online instructor must be specific regarding acceptable equipment and software.

Status of the class

Whether through written biographies, questionnaires, journal prompts, philosophies, or discussion, it is important to know the backgrounds and prior knowledge of learners when deciding what to teach , how to teach, and to what depth. Teachers who ask students what their goals and objectives are can use this information to make assignments more meaningful. This makes learning more personalized because the teacher values their input.

Objectives

Thinking and sharing in small groups, participants will design their own online courses. Groups will explore possibilities for creating alternative assessments and a community of learners online. Participants will examine their own literacy histories (ways of knowing) in order to understand how authentic experiences can happen in a virtual classroom. Participants will articulate and defend completed projects.

Mini-Lesson

Step one is to set goals, state objectives, and determine outcomes/assessments.

What do you want the students to know and be able to do? What evidence will be required to show knowledge and skill? How will you assess?	Goals: Objectives: Outcomes/Assessments:

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Step two is to consider your audience.

Learning about the assumptions students have coming into class and their current content knowledge relating to the subject matter is essential in developing tasks and assignments. Following are several strategies for audience analysis. • Questionnaires • Biography • Guided discussion • Oral quiz • Journal prompt	Audience analysis strategy:

Step three is to adjust the content.

Having the expertise to decide what content is essential and most beneficial is the instructor's most important responsibility. What is really important for the students to know? What is the most effective way to deliver content?	Lists, texts, articles, web sites, lecture topics, or other resources. List activities, projects, tasks, prompts.

Step four is to plan for assessment.

Although there are many terms, for different kinds of assessments, the important thing to know is that assessment is a tool for learning. How will you know if your objectives were met? How will you judge what your students are able to do or how well they can do it? • Responding in writing • Assessments with rubrics • Standardized evaluation • Rank ordering grading	Alternative assessments:

Step five is to consider the tasks and activities needed for exploration, application, or practice.

While most traditional teachers think of themselves as dispensers of knowledge, they must understand that this is not learning. Students have a more important part to play in learning than memorizing and duplicating information on tests. What authentic experiences can be arranged so students could apply new concepts to scaffold deeper understandings?

- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Investigating
- Projects

Authentic experiences:

Step six is finding ways to enhance assignments to engage students.

When the teaching role changes from *teller* to *facilitator*, students accept the lead. Teaching students to monitor and manage their own learning increases autonomy and ensures engagement.

- Reflective self assessment
- Student choice
- Student empowerment
- Peer assessment
- Knowledge construction

Learning enhancements:

Share Time

Participants demonstrate evidence of learning by articulating what they have learned. A final poster presentation offers all an opportunity to defend their work and respond to others. Organizing one's work into a visual display gives way to common themes and meaningful connections.

Conclusion

The following documents support this workshop approach: Initial Design of Instructional Techniques – Model 1, Best Practice of Online Teaching and Learning- W-W Model 2, Ways to Include Best Practice Principles in Lessons, Technology Standards, Using Bloom's Taxonomy in Assignment Design (http://www.umuc.edu/ugp/ewp/bloomtax.html), and a research summary of evidence of best practice and higher order thinking in student work from an online course.

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